

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: LABOR SITUATION

REFS: (A) ADDIS 5289, (B) ADDIS 4184

1. SUMMARY. LABOR SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA OVER PAST TWO MONTHS HAS PRESENTED PATTERN OF RECURRING CYCLES OF TURMOIL AND RELATIVE QUIESCENCE. CURRENT DISPUTES, ESPECIALLY TRUCK DRIVERS' STRIKE WHICH HAS HALTED ROAD GOODS TRAFFIC ALL OVER COUNTRY (EXCEPT ASMARA/MASSAWA AREA), PORTEND NEW PHASE OF MORE INTENSE DEMONSTRATION OF DEMANDS. CELU, WHICH IS BEING BLAMED FOR TROUBLES WHETHER EVENTS OCCUR AMONG THEIR MEMBERS OR NOT, IS TRYING TO KEEP ITS HEAD DOWN AND AVOID ANY FURTHER MAJOR CONFRONTATION WITH IEG, ESPECIALLY WITH COMMITTEE IN MINISTRY OF DEFENSE WHICH ACTIVELY CONCERNING ITSELF WITH ALL WORK STOPPAGES. NOW THAT EFFECTS OF ROAD TRANSPORT STRIKE BEING SEVERELY FELT (ADDIS FAST RUNNING OUT OF GASOLINE AND COOKING GAS AND OIL, SUPPLIES OF GRAIN AND CHARCOAL DWINDLING), RUMORS ARE GROWING STRONG THAT POLICE AND/OR ARMY WILL INTERVENE AND PERHAPS CLOSE CELU.
END SUMMARY.

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2. SIT-DOWN STRIKE AMONG TELECOMMUNICATIONS WORKERS STARTED

CURRENT PHASE OF TURMOIL. AFTER IEG REFUSED TO REMOVE OR SUSPEND SEVERAL SENIOR MANAGERS OF IBTE UNLESS MALFEASANCE CHARGES PROVEN AND WHEN IT SEEMED EVIDENT OTHER DEMANDS WOULD BE SUBJECT TO LONG DRAWN-OUT PROCEDURES, WORKERS REPORTED FOR DUTY BUT DIDN'T WORK. ARMY ATTEMPTED UNSUCCESSFULLY FORCE RESUMPTION OF WORK AT GUN-POINT. SMALL NUMBER OF ARMY SIGNAL CORPS PERSONNEL WERE BROUGHT IN TO PERFORM LIMITED FUNCTIONS. STALEMATE CARRIED ON FOR NEARLY TWO WEEKS, UNTIL IEG ISSUED ORDER THAT NON-WORKERS WOULD BE DIS-MISSED. AFTER ARMY LINED EVERYONE UP FOR ISSUANCE ID CARDS, SIT-DOWNERS BEGAN TO STIR AND PERFORM DUTIES AT VERY SLOW PACE. WITHIN LAST FEW DAYS WORK HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL, BUT TENSE ATMOSPHERE REMAINS. ARMY UNITS STILL INSIDE IBTE "TO PREVENT SABOTAGE."

3. CELU MEANWHILE ENDEAVORED AVOID PUBLICITY AND CONCENTRATED ON CONTRACT BARGAINING AND ORGANIZING. AGREEMENTS WERE SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDED WITH HVA SUGAR ESTATES, BAHAR DAR COTTON MILLS, ETHIOPIAN ABATTOIR IN ADDIS, RUBBER AND CANVAS SHOE CO. AND GLASS AND BOTTLE CO. MAJOR COMPENSATION ISSUE AT ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES HAS BEEN AGREED UPON AND FINAL CONTRACT THOUGH UNFINISHED IS EXPECTED IN NEAR FUTURE. IN GENERAL THESE CONTRACTS PROVIDE 10 PERCENT OR BETTER INCREASE IN WAGES BASED ON COST OF LIVING. ESTABLISHMENT OF PROVIDENT FUNDS, PROVISION HOSPITALIZATION AND MEDICAL TREATMENT FOR NON-OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES WERE MAJOR SOCIAL BENEFITS SOUGHT, AND CONCEDED IN SOME MEASURE. CELU ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES RESULTED IN FORMATION OF 47 NEW UNIONS DURING PAST TWO MONTHS, RAISING TOTAL MEMBERSHIP CLAIMED FROM 80,000 TO 102,000.

4. STRIKES AND LOCKOUTS HAVE CONTINUED. COTTON MILLS IN ADDIS (LAZARIDIS AND DIABACO) WERE SHUT DOWN BRIEFLY. FOLLOWING ACRIMONIOUS PRESS EXCHANGES, PARTICULARLY BY LAZARIDIS FIRM, CASES WERE STEERED INTO LABOR RELATIONS BOARD AND WORK RESUMED. ALSO, SPORADIC WORK STOPPAGES OR PRESENTATIONS OF DEMANDS HAVE APPEARED IN VARIOUS PARTS OF COUNTRY, INDICATING CONTINUED WIDESPREAD UNREST AND IMPATIENCE WITH IEG FOR FAILURE COME UP WITH SPECIFIC PROPOSALS BASED ON AGREEMENT WHICH CONCLUDED GENERAL STRIKE MARCH 10.

5. TRUCK DRIVERS BEGAN STRIKE ON JUNE 3 WITH ADDIS AND NAZARETH AS MAJOR FOCAL POINTS, BUT BY JUNE 5 STRIKE HAD BECOME COUNTRY-WIDE UNCLASSIFIED

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(EXCEPT ASMARA AND MASSAWA). WORKERS' SPOKESMEN POINT TO PETITION OF 21 POINTS SUBMITTED TO PRIME MINISTER EARLY MAY AND DEMANDED NEGOTIATIONS WITH IEG ROAD TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION TO RESOLVE ISSUES. MEETINGS HELD JUNE 7 AND 8 APPEARED TO BE CONSTRUCTIVE AND HOPE OF INTERIM SETTLEMENT WAS HIGH WHEN INCIDENT OCCURRED IN FRONT CELU BUILDING. POLICE FIRED ON AND OVER CROWD OF TRUCK DRIVERS (ONLY ONE PERSON INJURED) AND ARRESTED ABOUT 30. TEMPERS RAN VERY HIGH, AND ALL THOUGHTS OF SETTLEMENT

VANISHED. CELUE AND REPRESENTATIVES OF DRIVERS PERSUADED POLICE TO WITHDRAW FROM SCENE AND TO RELEASE THOSE IN PRISON. NOW NEGOTIATIONS RESUMED, AND AGREEMENT REPORTEDLY REACHED WHICH BEING PRESENTED TO TRUCK DRIVERS.

6. PROBLEM IS TWOFOLD: (A) MOST DRIVERS' COMPLAINTS ARE AGAINST TREATMENT BY POLICE, CUSTOMS OFFICERS AND HIGHWAY AUTHORITIES AND INVOLVE PETTY CORRUPTION, DISPUTED RULES OF ROAD AND CLAIMS OF ARBITRARY AND HARSH TREATMENT BY POLICE. FEW OF THESE ISSUES SUSCEPTIBLE TO COMPROMISE OR SPECIFIED AGREEMENT, AS ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS ARE PARAMOUNT. (B) TRUCK DRIVERS' MOOD REMAINS HEATED, AND CELU AND DRIVERS' REPRESENTATIVES ARE HAVING GREAT DIFFICULTY PERSUADING LARGE, UNDISCIPLINED GROUP OF 7000 TO AGREE TO ANYTHING.

7. ABOVE PROBLEMS, AS WELL AS REPORTS OF INCREASED PETTY CRIME AND THIEVERY, HAVE NATURALLY HAD UNSETTLING EFFECT ON URBAN POPULACE.
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